

LEVITICUS 25: 1-7 BIBLE STUDY

Introduction

What comes to mind when you think of the word Sabbath? Do you remember which of the Ten Commandments it is? Do you think about the practice of going to the local, hip coffee shop with a leather journal and ESV Bible in hand? Or perhaps do you think of farming practices? This study will help your group rethink the spiritual discipline of observing the Sabbath as a tangible expression of seeking Shalom.

Notes for the Discussion Leader

Some historical context will help set the scene so you can better understand the way the Israelites might have received the word the Lord gave Moses about the Sabbath.

1. This passage is the latter of the laws God was setting for Moses and the Israelites as they were to live in the Promised Land
2. The Israelites were recently delivered from the more modern Egyptian society in which food production was happening at a very large scale and a high rate but at the expense of the Israelites themselves, who were slaves in Egypt
3. Just as God ordered that his people would set aside a day each week to observe the Sabbath (Exodus 20:8-11), He ordered the land He was giving them would also have a year set aside to rest
4. The Israelites grew crops and kept animals in a semi-arid climate before the introduction of industrialized, mechanized farming methods like the ones we have today

Leave some time for the group to watch a video and listen to a teaching. The video is created by Our Changing Climate and discusses soil health. (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8kZXuLLobA8>) [You can play the whole thing or stop at 3:53] The theological teaching on Sabbath for the land by was given by professor Norman Wirzba to a group of InterVarsity students and staff on a 2014 EcoPlunge. Prepare this ahead of time.

(<https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B9Y9GktwaDWRNzk4a0xrcWxaSk0/view?usp=sharing>) [Time 41:46-45:12])

Study and Discuss

Turn to Leviticus 25:1-7 and have someone in the group read it out loud.

Here are some Questions and Main Points that can be discussed using the text:

1. Why does God want the land to rest? The discipline of not exhausting the land of all its resources (i.e. soil nutrients, water, crops) maintained its long-term health, helped the Israelites learn how to plan their harvests well, and reminded them that it was God's land, given to them to steward well, trusting in his provision. By resting the land's strength could revive and its productivity increased. Modern agronomists have supported the practice of allowing land to lie fallow periodically.
2. What is the importance of Sabbath?
 - a. For people? (Exodus 20:8-11) Here, God wasn't creating the notion of Sabbath for his people, He was reenacting it, as the Israelites were not given a Sabbath day off from labor when they were slaves. He has originally set the day aside as holy, since the creation of the world, and He was calling his people to go back to setting it aside for worship.
 - b. For the land? The Nation of Israel was a subsistence farming, pre-industrial society who had to have an intimate and reverent relationship with the land in order to survive. Their dependence on the land and on God was evident, and even farming was meant to be an act of worship as crops that grew up during the sabbatical year were given as an offering to Yahweh.

3. Who does the Sabbath year provide for? Verses 6 and 7 state that this year's worth of crops were to be open for slaves, foreigners, and all animals to take, allowing for the mandated provision of those overlooked by society.
4. How is this a picture of the Kingdom of God? These instructions on how to worship the Lord on the Sabbath involves more than just focusing on our individual relationships with God, and widens our perspectives to incorporate our livelihoods, our resources, and the people and nature around us. It also reminds us that God cares about those on the margins-- so much that he commanded that his people care for them in very practical ways.
5. How does this image contrast our modern ways relating to the earth? The current farming practices in America are primarily focused on producing the most amount of food, in the most efficient way, at the lowest economic cost. But, this causes major problems within the agro-industrial complex such as the treatment of farm workers, the use of pesticides and antibiotics, the immense greenhouse gas emissions, and the depletion and degradation of topsoil health.

Why Soil Matters Video



Audio Teaching on the Sabbath Year



Active Response

From what we learn from Leviticus 25, there are many implications for how believers can honor God through the observance of Sabbath. Discuss how the instructions in this passage can be applied to our lives today.

How can we be practicing Sabbath in ways that:

- Increase our dependence on God?
- Connect us to the land and bring restoration?
- Provide for the marginalized and disenfranchised in our communities?

Commit to trying Sabbath this way-- this way that includes more than just you and God, rather, it is an exercise of looking beyond the individual to witness how he is the Sustainer and Provider. For example, get into nature as a group to pray, take a trip to the farmers market and cook a meal to share with others, or volunteer at a local community garden for Sabbath.